

# Episode 44

## First Trip to America

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1978, circa Shaban 1398 AH, I received a telephone call from the Secretary of the Council of Islamic Ideology, respected Muzaffar Ashraf, informing: “A convention is being held in America on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July. Respected President Zia-ul-Haq has formed a three-member delegation to participate in it. This includes, besides yourself, respected Khalid Ishaq Advocate and respected Dr Tanzeel ur-Rahman. Please prepare for this trip to America immediately.” To this end, he made gratis (official) passports for us expeditiously, and our flight reservations were also confirmed within a few days. On the return flight, I desired to visit London, then Cairo and Hijaz as well, as in those days one could stay over in a few countries which were on the way of a long-distance trip without having to pay any extra amount for the flight fare. We thus made our tickets according to this itinerary. Until this time, no one in our family, Madrasa or acquaintances had visited the Western world. In my sphere of interactions, I was the first one travelling to these regions. I thus remember that when we arrived at the airport on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, a large crowd of my relatives had come to the airport to see me off. Besides all three of my brothers, my maternal and paternal nephews, relatives from the in-laws’ side, people from Darul Uloom, all had gathered. Dr Tanzeel-ur-Rahman’s and my seats were together in the First-Class section of the PIA flight. Respected Khalid Ishaq was to travel separately. The plane was to fly to Dubai first, then Cairo, then Frankfurt, then stop over in Paris, and finally cross the Atlantic Ocean to reach New York. We boarded the plane late at night, around 1 am, and after re-taking off from Dubai, we were travelling towards the West, along with the sun. As a result, that day was extended much beyond normal hours for us. When we first entered Europe, our first stop was Frankfurt. At that time, this city was enveloped in clouds, and the beauty of the city streaking through wispy clouds was a new experience for me. The airport itself was so large and well-equipped with modern facilities that I had never seen any airport like this. When we took off from here, the Orly Airport of Paris invited us to take in its traditional beauty. We offered Asr prayer in Paris. Thereafter the plane soared over the Atlantic Ocean for eight straight hours, and when it finally landed at New York’s Kennedy Airport, some time was still left for Asr time to end. By the time

we got off the plane and completed immigration procedures, it was already Maghrib time, which we offered at the airport itself. The Vice Consul of the Pakistani Embassy had come to receive us. The Conference was scheduled to take place in Charleston, the capital city of the state of West Virginia. We had arrived in New York at night, and perhaps no flight to Charleston was available at the time, so the Embassy arranged for our accommodation for the night in a hotel in front of LaGuardia Airport. This was our first night in America, but it was daytime based on Pakistan time. Thus, despite trying all night, I could not fall asleep. In the morning, we went for a walk outside. There was a highway in front of the hotel on which vehicles zoomed across. After a short walk, we came to the hotel's restaurant for breakfast. As soon as we sat down, a waiter poured black coffee into a large mug without even asking. This was cold as well as without milk, and was so bitter that it was difficult to gulp it in, as well as to spit it out. We learned that American whites begin their breakfast with this black coffee, so the waiter did not find it necessary to even ask. After somehow clearing off the bitter after-taste of this coffee from my tongue, I took the toast and egg. When I took the tea, it was also cold, as well as sugarless. While many sugar packets were available, their sweetness was rather lackluster.

In those days, there were very few acquaintances in New York. I had the phone number of the son of Hazrat Maulana Muhammad Mateen Khateeb, respected Muhammad Ameen, who was a childhood friend of mine. When I called him, he arrived and took me to his house. Our flight to Charleston was scheduled for afternoon the same day. We reached Charleston around Asr time. This was a time when the number of Pakistanis living in America was quite small, especially so in Charleston. When we landed in Charleston airport, it was a Pakistani couple who were more active in receiving us than even the organizers of the conference. At our asking, they informed that they were doctors in a hospital in Charleston (sadly, I do not remember their names). They had heard that two participants from Pakistan were arriving to take part in the conference, and their love for Pakistan carried them to the airport. In fact there were very few Pakistanis living there at that time, and the few who lived there were eager to see and meet other Pakistanis. It was this eagerness that drove them to arrive at the airport and welcome strangers from Pakistan. We were quite touched by this spirit of theirs. Later, they took such care of us during our stay in Charleston as if we were members of their household.

Our accommodation was arranged in Holiday Inn Hotel. We arrived here around late afternoon. After a short while, the aforementioned doctor brought two large bags of dry fruits and tidbits with the words: "Pakistanis suffer from jet lag when arriving here and their routine is disturbed. Perhaps you may feel hungry at odd hours. You can use these at such times." We were tired so we went to sleep to get some rest. Our biological cycle was indeed quite disturbed. When I woke up, it was 11pm at night. Maghrib prayer had become Qada. I quickly got up and prayed Maghrib and Isha. Thereafter when we came to the restaurant to eat something, it was closed. The waiter informed: "The restaurant at the top-most floor of the hotel is open. You can go there." When we arrived here, it was all dark except small flames glowing atop the tables. We sat at a table and asked the waitress for fish, as no other Halal food could be expected. While the waitress took the order, she returned shortly and said: "Pardon me, but this place may not be appropriate for you. You could place an order through room service." Her words and tone implied that this place would soon be transformed into a night club. And from the beards on our faces and our dressing, the waitress deduced that we were Muslims, and that shortly when the night club would begin its activities, we would not want to sit here. In this manner, Allah Most High removed us from this difficulty with ease. And this was the first time I realized the value of my beard and Pakistani dressing, as due to these, even a non-Muslim lady realized that the activities soon beginning in this place were not appropriate for these, and in this manner Allah Most High protected us from a test. After this, the heart did not desire to eat anything, and we appreciated the bags of dry fruits that the respected doctor had brought for us, and sufficed with them.

I went for a stroll outside the hotel after Fajr. A river flowed beyond the road on which the hotel was located, and both sides of the river were quite lush and verdant. However, the smell of oil saturated the environment throughout the walk, which ruined the pleasure of the walk. It was learned that this is an industrial city, and that the air here is polluted by this odour due to the large number of factories. It was surprising as to how this kind of environmental pollution was being tolerated in such a developed country as America.

At that time, there were numerous Muslim organizations in existence in America, most of which were established by Arab Muslims. A conglomeration of these organizations, called "Federation

of Islamic Associations”, existed, whose secretary was a Lebanese Muslim named Mr Asad. It was he who had requested the late President Zia-ul-Haq to send representatives from Pakistan to participate in their convention planned to be held in July. The late President sent the three of us for this. We presumed it to be an educational convention in which Muslims and their children would be taught something about their religion, and we would also receive an opportunity to contribute something in this respect. However, when we arrived here, it turned out to be a social gathering with one session titled “Islam in America”, in which I was to deliver a talk. This was the first time for me to deliver a speech in English. As such, I had prepared the speech before-hand and read that prepared speech itself, a summary of which has been published in “Jahan-e-Deedah”. Respected Tanzeel-ur-Rahman and Khalid Ishaq delivered extempore speeches. However, when we arrived for dinner in the evening, we saw the unfortunate scene of several Muslim ladies donning half-naked Western dresses sitting in mixed gatherings with men, and it was being announced on the loud speaker: “Whoever wishes to eat Halal should suffice with fish”, which meant that the meat being served was not Halal. The atmosphere was immersed in Western immodesty. An Arab youngster came to the mic and objected to the ladies’ dressing, at which chants of “Backwardness, Backwardness” were raised from the hall. We remained sitting hunched up in a corner for a while, but then quickly escaped to safety.

The next day, a ship ride in a nearby river was planned. In this program as well, we could not perceive even a sliver of Islamicness. Looking at this, we went to meet Mr Asad, the President of the Federation, and said: “We are quite hurt observing this kind of atmosphere. If you cannot teach these people the Islamic way of life through this convention, then what is the benefit of organizing it in the first place?” His eyes welled up when he heard this, and replied: “Sir! We are ourselves worried about this situation. However, the truth is that most of these are the children of those Arab families who had settled in America for the sake of livelihood years ago, and adopted the way of life here. Therefore, they are quite badly influenced by the atmosphere in America, and as of now, we consider it a great blessing if they somehow continue to call and consider themselves to be Muslims. We thus do not treat them strictly in these kinds of gatherings fearing that they may turn apostate if we do so.” These words made our hair stand on end. Thereafter we presented some recommendations to them, and heartfelt supplications

gushed forth from the bottom of the heart, that may Allah Most High safeguard the faith of the Muslims here. After this trip to America, I recounted this eye-opening incident to my Muslim brothers and sisters during many travels and cautioned them that safeguarding the *Iman* (faith) of their future generations was a paramount obligation upon them, and that if they did not pay attention to it, then, may Allah protect us, the situation can deteriorate to such distressing extents. Alhamdulillah, as more Muslims began living in these countries, the circumstances improved to a large extent. However, the reality is that looking at the condition of the majority of the Muslims residing there, the issue of preserving the *Iman* (faith) of their children is still quite worrisome.

After the conference in Charleston, we went to Washington. Here, the Science Museum was especially interesting and we also toured the White House. Thereafter Mr Khalid Ishaq returned to Pakistan while Dr Tanzeel-ur-Rahman and I stayed in New York at the house of an acquaintance, Mr. Nazim, for a few days. This was my first visit to New York, so I visited some of the famous sites here, such as the Empire State Building. At that time, there were very few mosques in New York and finding Halal food was a tall order. Therefore, I happened to eat vegetarian pizza there for the first time.

In those days, if one stopped over at several places through various airlines enroute a long-distance flight, the airfare would be almost the same. Thus, we first visited London from New York. Here also, we stayed at the house an acquaintance of mine, respected Ansarullah. This was also my first time visiting London, so I visited the notable sites here as well, and I was also asked to deliver a talk in the mosque of Regent's Park. There were very few mosques here in London as well, and the Balham Mosque was also quite small.

I had a desire to see Muslim countries from a young age, especially Egypt. To this end, we took an Ethiopia Airlines flight from London to Cairo. I had no acquaintances in Cairo in those days, so we booked a medium class hotel at the airport itself. This was located in the Duqqi neighbourhood of Cairo, which is situated on the other side of River Nile, in Giza. We wished to visit al-Azhar University as well as to meet the Shaykh of al-Azhar. When we called to make an appointment with him, he asked to come the next morning.

Our evening was free while I had to buy sheets of Ihram besides sightseeing around the city. I asked Dr Tanzeel-ur-Rahman to accompany me but he was tired and wanted to rest. I thus asked for directions at the hotel and took a taxi, and asked the driver to take me to a bazaar where Ihram could be purchased. He drove to some bazaar across the River Nile and alighted me. While I could speak Arabic even at that time, the local Egyptian dialect was utterly incomprehensible to me. Thus, the sheets of Ihram were discovered after a lengthy quest. Then when I hailed a taxi to return to the hotel, communicating the address to the driver turned out to be quite a problem. Anyway! This complication was somehow resolved, but then I myself forgot the way back to the hotel. It was during this trip that I realized the difficulties one could face in a foreign land without a guide. Finally, after supplications to Allah, I somehow managed to reach the hotel.

We went to al-Azhar University the next day. At that time, Shaykh Jaad ul-Haq (may Allah's mercy be upon him) was the Shaykh of al-Azhar. He met us with warmth and love. I mentioned the services of the scholars of Deoband to the science of Hadith, and my work on Fath ul-Mulhim came up, at which he said: "The Director of al-Azhar, Shaikh Husaini, is working on Musnad Ahmad. You should meet him." Thereafter he himself took us to him. Shaykh Husaini also met us quite warmly, and informed that he was planning to convene a conference on the topic of Hadith. In view of the services to Hadith rendered by the scholars of Deoband, he said to me: "I will invite you when the conference is convened. Please write an essay on the Hadith-related services of the scholars of Deoband for this conference." (Consequently, he later sent me this invitation and I also wrote the essay, which has been included in Maqalat al-Usmani, but the conference was postponed for some reasons).

As a result of having acquaintances in al-Azhar, we also received some guidance for seeing various notable sites in Cairo. Besides al-Azhar University and Hayy Sayyiduna Husain, we visited the museum containing the mummies of pharaohs as well as the newly built eighty-storey Cairo Tower located on the bank of the Nile. That evening was the 29<sup>th</sup> of Shaban. It was learned that a committee of scholars had announced the sighting of the crescent of Ramadan. It was at this time that I learned that the rumour that Egypt relies on astronomical calculations instead of actual sighting of the moon is utterly false. We had a seat reserved for the flight to Jeddah that

night. We departed the same night and arrived in Makkah Mukarramah late into the night and began our first fast of Ramadan there itself. We stayed in Madrasa Sawlatiyyah. By that time, the pebbled courtyard between the Mataf and Turkish building was still in existence, and Taraweeh prayer would take place inside the Mataf itself. Alhamdulillah! The opportunity to spend a few days of Ramadan in Makkah Mukarramah and Madinah Tayyibah was received. The second Saudi extension had not yet taken place in Madinah Munawwarah. In a street adjacent to the eastern side of Bab Umar, the Ribat Bengal was established under the management of Hazrat Maulana Abdul Quddoos (may Allah's mercy be upon him). Accommodation was arranged here. Thereafter, after a second visit to Makkah Mukarramah, I returned to Karachi from Jeddah. I had penned a very short mention of this trip in Al-Balagh, which has been included in "Jahan-e-Deedah" under the title "Few Days in Europe and America".

### **Offer of Teaching Position in Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University**

In Shaban 1399 AH (July 1979), I received a sudden telegram from the Director of the Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh which stated that I had been appointed as a teacher in the university, and that I should confirm my acceptance of this appointment. I was surprised as to how I could be appointed to this position without even applying for it? While now there is a good number of Saudi scholars who are acquaintances of this lowly one, in those days I was unknown at least in that country. Then the thought crossed my mind that Hazrat Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah (may Allah's mercy be upon him) is a teacher in the Faculty of Usool ud-Deen in this very university, and he had also visited here a month or two ago. Perhaps he may have presented my name for this position. And within a few days, I received two letters from Hazrat Shaykh which confirmed this conjecture. In one of the letters, he wrote:

"أكتب لكم هذه الكلمة العجلى تحية وصلة. قدّمت اسمكم الكريم للجامعة، وسيأتي إن شاء الله الطلب إليكم، وأرجو أن نسعد بكم في الرياض لتكون رياضاً  
نفاحة بهجة"

Translation:

“I am writing these words in haste to convey my Salam and dua. I have presented your name to the university and InshaAllah you shall soon receive a request to join them, and I hope that we will receive blessings through you in Riyadh, and Riyadh will become saturated with fragrance and joys.”

With respect to this matter, the second relatively more detailed letter from Hazrat is a great example of his extreme benevolence. I am reproducing it in full:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إلى الأخ الحبيب المحب الحب ابن الحب فضيلة الشيخ العلامة المحدث الفقيه مولانا محمد تقي كان الله له وبلغه أمله، وأكرمني بصالح دعواته آمين.

من أخيه راجي دعواته عبد الفتاح أبو غدة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته.

وبعد: فأحمد الله تعالى إليكم، وأرجو أن تكونوا وكل من معكم ويعزّ عليكم بخير من الله ونعمة.

لعل البرقية التي أرسلت من قبل مدير الجامعة بدعوتكم وصلت إليكم في حينها، فإنني منذ عدت إلى الرياض قدّمت التقرير عن اختيار فضيلتكم لتكونوا في أسرة التدريس المختارة الممتازة في الجامعة، ورحب المدير بذلك والحمد لله، ثم أرسل برقية بهذا كما وعدني، واليوم قبل إرسال هذه التحية إليكم ذهبت إلي مدير الجامعة وسألته عن إرسال البرقية للسفير عنكم لإعطاء التأشيرة ... فأجاب أن قد أرسلت من أيام، فأرجو أن يكون تم ذلك بعون الله تعالى.

والدراسات عندنا تبدأ من ١/ ذي القعدة في هذا العام إن شاء الله ومعني بدايتها منه أن المدرسين يعودون إلى الجامعة في هذا اليوم أو الذي يليه ١٣٩٩/١١/٢ هـ ويكون الاختبار الثاني للطلاب، ولعل الدراسة الفعلية تبدأ حقيقة في ١٥/ أو ٢٠/ منه، أذكر لكم هذا لتنظموا عملكم وسفركم من الآن، وحبذا لو أخبرتموني برسالة قريية عن عزمكم للحضور بعون الله تعالى جزماً، لعلنا نوفق باختيار مسكن لكم مناسب إذا علمت به، فإن اختيار المسكن مهم، وإذا كانت الجامعة تقدمه لكم فأولي، ويعطون ١٠/ آلاف لتأثيث المسكن للقادم، هذه منحة غير داخلية في الراتب الشهري وتعويض المسكن، فإن تعويض المسكين ١٧/ الفاً لغير الأستاذ، ولمرتبة الاستاذ ٢٠ الفاً، ولكن الأجرة الفعلية قد تزيد وقد تنقص بحسب المسكن سعة وضيقاً، فكم غرفة ترغبون وكم عدد الاسرة العزيزة بارك الله فيها؟ وعلي كل حال لعلّي آخذ علم ذلك منكم مع الأخ الوارد إلينا بعد نحو عشرة أيام كما أخبرني بذلك الأخ إلياس، وختاماً تحياتي لكم وللأخ الأعزّ فضيلة الشيخ محمد رفيع وإلى باقي الأحباب والأصحاب، وأستودعكم الله، إلى لقاء قريب حبيب بإذن الله، والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله.

الرياض ١٣٩٩/٨/٢٣ هـ أخوكم عبد الفتاح أبو غدة

ملاحظة: يوجد في الرياض مدرسة للأولاد الباكستانيين خاصة بهم مأذون بها من الدولة هنا، فقد يحتاجون إلى معرفة هذا. والله ولي التوفيق.

Summarized translation of the letter:



“After Salam and dua,

Perhaps the letter from the director of the university in Riyadh may have reached you in time. After returning to Riyadh, I had sent a detailed recommendation regarding yourself to the director of the university, i.e. that you should be included among the specially chosen and distinguished teachers at the university. Alhamdulillah the director of the university welcomed this recommendation, and consequently sent you the telegram. I asked him about this today itself, at which he replied that he had sent the telegram and also asked the Ambassador of Pakistan to help arrange for your visa, and I hope this matter would also have been settled.

Our academic year shall begin from the 1<sup>st</sup> of Dhi Qa’dah this year, which means that teachers would be returning on this date or a day later. Thereafter a test of the students shall take place, and actual lessons shall begin from the 15<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> of Dhi Qa’dah. I am informing you of this so that you can prepare for your travel accordingly. How good would it be if you could inform me of your final decision of coming here, so that I could search for an appropriate house for you, for housing is an important matter. If the university arranges for accommodation by itself, that would be good. In that case, they shall provide 10 thousand riyals for the furniture and other necessities of the house. This amount is on top of the monthly salary and house allowance. For non-teaching staff, house allowance is 17 thousand riyals and for teachers it is 20 thousand riyals. However, the rent of the house could be more or less depending on the type of house. How many rooms would you like in your house? And how many family members would be staying with you?

InshaAllah I shall gather all this information through a companion who should be visiting you soon, as Maulana Ilyas has informed me. Salam to Hazrat Maulana Muhammad Rafi.

Note: A separate school for Pakistani children is available here in Riyadh, which also has official permission from the Kingdom. I am mentioning this as perhaps you may need it.”

I was inundated by the extraordinary benevolence of Hazrat Shaykh that this letter exhibits. May Allah Most High shower him with His mercies. Caring for an unworthy student to such an extent and honouring him so much bear witness to such lofty character as only he possessed. Nonetheless, this honourable letter put me in a quandary. It was the effect of my respected

father's (may Allah's mercy be upon him) upbringing and the blessings of his companionship that Alhamdulillah there was no noteworthy attraction towards the worldly benefits of being appointed as a teacher in the university in Riyadh. On the other hand, the heart was not willing to permanently leave the services being rendered to Darul Uloom. My respected mother (may Allah's mercy be upon her) had also been unwell for quite some time, and leaving her in this condition weighed heavily on the heart. Additionally, it felt necessary to remain involved in the implementation of Islamic laws that had recently started in Pakistan. However, the biggest attraction for me was that this would give me an excellent opportunity of benefitting from the companionship of Hazrat Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah (may Allah's mercy be upon him). Furthermore, it was hoped that the knowledge of Arabic language could be improved by staying in Arab environment. I thus began pondering over this decision from this viewpoint, and considered accepting this offer for one year. During this period, Alhamdulillah Hazrat Maulana Mufti Muhammad Rafi Usmani (may his shade be extended) was ready to take care of Darul Uloom as well as our respected mother. Also, it was hoped to remain involved in the compilation of Islamic laws in some capacity from Riyadh as well. I thus began performing Istikhara prayer from this angle, and also consulted others. My elder brothers were of the opinion that this offer should be taken up. However, the more Istikhara I performed the less was my heart inclined towards this proposal. In the end, I sought counsel from my Shaykh (spiritual mentor) Hazrat Arifi (may his secret be sanctified) and informed him of all my circumstances. After listening to all my circumstances, Hazrat advised to excuse myself. In the wake of the extraordinary graces and benevolence of Hazrat Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah (may Allah's mercy be upon him), it was not easy for me to excuse myself, and I was in a quandary: with what face can I excuse myself before him? However, it so transpired with the will of Allah that he wrote me a letter at the end of Ramadan, informing that he would be visiting Karachi immediately after Eid. After explaining the circumstances of his visit, he wrote:

"ولعلي بهذه المناسبة أدرك آخر العيد عنكم، فأجمع فيه بين عيدين لقائكم وعيد الفطر السعيد، ولقاء الأحابب الأنجاء لديكم، ولعلكم تهيأتم للسفر إلينا على أوائل ذي القعدة، لتكونوا في أول العام الدراسي في مقر عملكم المنتظر لكم، أعانكم الله ويسر عليكم كل عسير."

الرياض الأربعاء ٢١ / من رمضان المبارك ١٣٩٩ هـ

Translation:

“On this occasion, perhaps I may be with you on the last day of Eid, and in this manner I would enjoy two Eids on the same day: one, the Eid of meeting you and other brothers, and second, Eid al-Fitr. And perhaps by this time you may have become ready to travel to us in the beginning of Dhi Qa’dah, so that you could reach the destination that is awaiting you at the beginning of the academic year itself. May Allah Most High make it easy for you and remove all obstacles.”

Consequently, Hazrat visited Darul Uloom on the occasion of Eid and stayed here for several days. On this occasion, I received an opportunity to talk to Hazrat regarding moving to Riyadh. After thanking Hazrat for his kindnesses, for which I did not even possess words that could do justice to them, I mentioned my difficulties. Hazrat listened to them large-heartedly, and especially at hearing of the illnesses of my respected mother (may Allah’s mercy be upon her), he accepted it with an open heart, and at the same time advised me to write this excuse to the Director of the university. I thus did this. Thereafter I received a telegram from the Director of the university in which, while accepting my excuse, he also wrote: “You have an open invitation from the university, i.e. whenever your respected mother’s health gets better and it becomes possible for you to join us, you shall be most welcome.”